

Exhibit A

OLIVIA Y. LITIGATION
MDCPS COVID-19 STATUS UPDATE

TO: MARCIA LOWRY; ANASTASIA BENEDETTO
LISA TAYLOR; EILEEN CRUMMY

FROM: BAKER DONELSON – LARRY JONES & CLINT PENTECOST

SUBJECT: UPDATE TO DEFENDANTS' NOTICE OF THE IMPACT OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON DEFENDANTS' OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE 2ND MODIFIED MISSISSIPPI SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT AND REFORM PLAN

DATE: MARCH 25, 2020

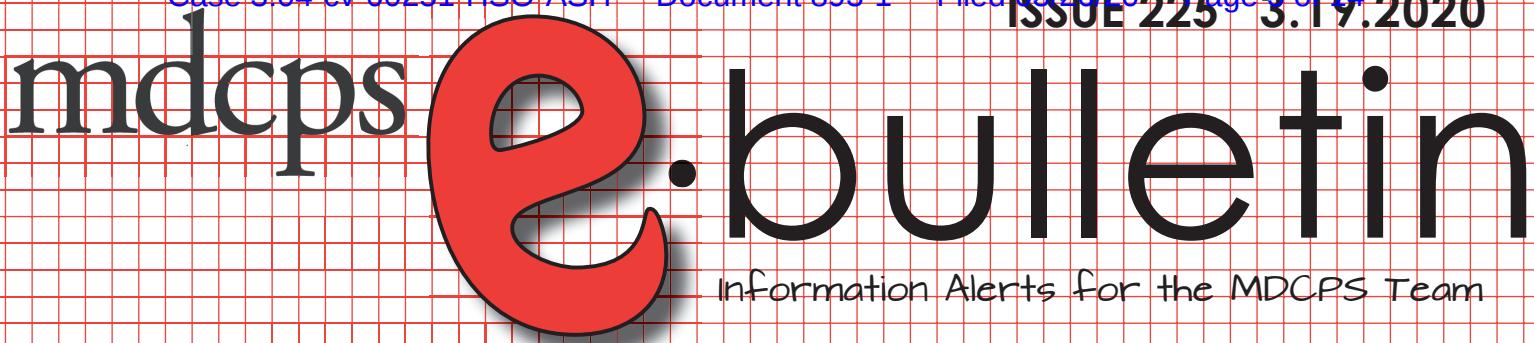
CC: TAYLOR CHEESEMAN

Defendants filed their Notice of the Impact of the Novel Coronavirus (“COVID-19”) on Defendants’ Obligations Under the 2nd Modified Mississippi Settlement Agreement and Reform Plan (“2nd MSA”) on March 18, 2020 (“March 18 Notice”). MDCPS has begun to implement policies and take steps to protect the children in its custody and associated families as well as its staff and employees. The policies and steps being taken by MDCPS are based on the guidance being promulgated and revised and updated by the Mississippi State Department of Health (“MSDH”), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), and the World Health Organization (“WHO”). In addition to the COVID-19 Guidelines identified in Defendants’ March 18 Notice, MDCPS has issued the following:

- 3/19/20 ebulletin: COVID-19: Recording Face-to-Face Visits in MACWIS
- 3/19/20 Foster Parent Alert #5: Preschool, K-12 and collegiate youth issues
- 3/20/20 Foster Parent Alert #6: Communication
- 3/20/20 ebulletin: Staying in Touch; Keeping Track
- 3/23/20 Foster Parent Alert #7: Resources available to parents, foster parents
- 3/23/20 Revised COVID-19 Client Contact Guidelines

- 3/24/20 ebulletin: Updated: Recording Face-to-Face Visits in MACWIS
- 3/24/20 Foster Parent Alert #8: Tips for a safe in-home visit from MDCPS
- 3/24/20 ebulletin: Update to Emergency Telework Policy

A copy of each of these is attached for your reference.


 The logo features the text "mDCPS" in a dark grey sans-serif font, followed by a large red stylized "e" with a black outline. To the right of the "e" is the word "bulletin" in a large black sans-serif font. Below the "bulletin" text is the subtitle "Information Alerts for the MDCPS Team" in a smaller black sans-serif font.

To: ALL MDCPS
From: **TONYA ROGILLIO**, Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare
JAWORSKI DAVEPORT, Deputy Commissioner of Child Safety

COVID-19: Recording Face-to-Face Visits in MACWIS

In light of the information below received from Dr. Milner at the Children's Bureau, all face-to-face contacts with children and families, even those using Facetime or other videoconferencing means where the child is viewed remotely should be documented in MACWIS as follows:

Contact Type: Foster Child Contact (or other appropriate type)
 Contact Method: Face-to-Face
 Location: Home

However, if there are required visits or contacts that are unable to be made/conducted due to the COVID19 pandemic, that information should be documented as follows:

Contact Type: Other
 Contact Method: Phone to
 Location: Home (or other appropriate option)

All other contacts should be documented as usual.

GUIDANCE FROM THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU

QUESTION: Does video conferencing between a child in foster care and his/her caseworker meet the Federal statutory provisions at section 422(b)(17) for caseworker visits on a monthly basis?

ANSWER:

In general, no. Videoconferencing or any other similar form of technology between the child and caseworker does not serve as a monthly caseworker visit for the purposes of meeting the requirements of section 422(b)(17) of the Social Security Act (the Act). Rather, a monthly caseworker visit must be conducted face-to-face and held in person. Furthermore, the Act requires State and Tribal title IV-B agencies to describe standards for monthly caseworker visits with children in foster care that are well-planned and focused on issues pertinent to case planning and service delivery to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child.

However, there are limited circumstances in which a Title IV-B agency could waive the in-person aspect of the requirement and permit the monthly caseworker visit to be accomplished through a videoconferencing. Such circumstances are limited to those that are beyond the control of the caseworker, child, or foster family, such as a declaration of an emergency that prohibits or strongly discourages person-to-person contact for public health reasons; a child or caseworker whose severe health condition warrants limiting person-to-person contact; and other similar public or individual health challenges. Even in the face of such challenges, agencies must continue to comply with the monthly caseworker visit requirement. If an agency uses videoconferencing under these limited, specified circumstances, caseworkers must conduct the videoconference in accordance with the timeframe established in the Act, and must closely assess the child's safety at each conference. Also, we encourage agencies to consider plans of action should a caseworker not be able to reach a child via videoconference, or should the videoconference raise a concern about the child's safety or well-being. The waiver of the requirement would be narrowly limited to the timeframe during which the public or individual health challenge or issue renders it impossible or ill advised to meet the in-person requirement and should be well documented in the child's case plan. Scheduling conflicts and the like are insufficient grounds for waiving the in-person requirement.

March 19, 2020



Foster Parent Alert #5

Gov. Tate Reeves announced Thursday morning that public schools throughout Mississippi would remain closed until at least April 17 due to the spread of COVID-19. All foster parents should follow local school district announcements regarding at-home learning opportunities and homework assignments for children in their households. Many school districts are also continuing to provide “grab-and-go” breakfasts and lunches for students available at established drive-through locations. If you need additional assistance, please contact your caseworker, first, and then your licensure caseworker and let them know how we can support you during this time.

If foster parents need assistance with educational issues, they should contact the MDCPS educational liaisons by calling the appropriate education liaison for their county. (SEE ATTACHED MAP) If foster parents need assistance in providing additional school supplies, please contact the local school district or your caseworker for assistance.

Gov. Reeves signed an executive order Thursday morning that makes the closure of Mississippi schools official and also gives schools flexibility in teaching. By April 17, public schools in Mississippi will have been closed for four weeks, at which point Reeves said he and education officials will determine whether to further extend school closures. End-of-year testing requirements will be relaxed, and Reeves said he is giving the state education department more flexibility to waive or change its rules and regulations over the coming months.

Please check out the following link to the Mississippi Department of Education website which provides suggestions and guidance for students displaced from their classrooms: <https://www.mdek12.org/OAE/OEER/FamilyGuidesEnglish>

PLEASE READ: Preschool, K-12 and collegiate youth issues

With today's announcement that Mississippi's public schools will be closed for at least another month, increasing closures of both public and private daycares and preschools, and with most, if not all, community colleges and universities moving to online instruction, questions about the educational futures of our foster children are rampant.

MDCPS is working closely with the Mississippi Department of Education, the state's Institutions of Higher Learning staff and with the federal Children's Bureau to make sure that we are all sharing the same information and are aware of all decisions and situations affecting the children in your households.

Attached to this email you will find a Parent Guidance

newsletter from the Mississippi Department of Education which answers some frequently asked questions about the impact of COVID-19 on our education system. Your local school district should also be in touch with you very shortly with instructions about home study, homework and other resources they will be offering to parents.

MDCPS has a fully staffed Youth Transitions Support Services team available to assist you as foster parents with addressing specific needs of the children in your care. PLEASE reach out to the appropriate Transitional Navigator for your county. They should be able to assist with any educational issue you may be facing with your foster child.

A map listing the Transition Navigators for every county in Mississippi is attached -- along with contact information

so you can reach out to them directly. Please do so!

Additionally, many foster parents are concerned that their preschool children will be missing too many days of state-paid child care. MDCPS is working with the Mississippi Department of Human Services on a waiver of the 5-day-a-month limit for paid absences. We will keep you posted. Let the best interest of your foster child be your guide at this critical time.

If you have an older foster child facing financial issues because of displacement from university housing, part-time job loss because of COVID-19 shutdowns or other complications, please contact the Youth Transitions Support Services team for guidance.

Again, THANK YOU for EVERYTHING you do.

March 20, 2020



Foster Parent Alert #6

Congratulations! Although there seems little worth celebrating right now, everyone should be giving themselves a huge pat on the back and a hearty thumbs up simply for making it through week one of what is quickly becoming our new normal. Closed schools, toilet paper shortages, teleworking and distancing ourselves from the outside world has basically changed our daily lifestyles from sunrise to bedtime.

So, if you're still standing today -- CONGRATULATIONS!

While the healthcare community struggles with protecting and healing our country, we at MDCPS continue to work alongside you as foster parents and with other child welfare agencies to protect the children entrusted into our care and to heal the families that are broken. The tasks are difficult on the best of days and seemingly impossible on the tougher days like the ones we're living through right now. PLEASE KNOW that we at MDCPS value your role more than ever. We would be helpless to care for these children if you were not so generous with your time, your home, your family -- and your heart. YOU are the heroes who are keeping these children fed, clothed, nurtured and protected. We pledge to continue supporting you in your role.

We know you have questions. Please continue to ask them. Contact your Licensure caseworker. Talk with your child's caseworker. Email your support group. Use social media to gain wisdom from your support groups. Stay in touch with those in your circle who provide you support. Whenever we get answers -- from other state agencies or from the federal government -- we will share them with you.

Our hotline is open 1-800-222-8000 and our online reporting system is available at www.mdcps.ms.gov. Let us know how to help!

PLEASE READ: Our goal is to OVER-communicate

It may get to the point that these newsletters begin to sound the same. We're not sharing breaking news or changing policies or procedures. We're just reminding you of the same stuff over and over again.

That is, somewhat, intentional.

MDCPS would rather sound repetitive than not make any noise at all. WE WANT TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOU and with our staff and child welfare partners on a daily basis. We want to remind you that we are here, supporting you, even if you don't see us or actually talk with someone with our agency.

We want to reassure you that you are not alone.

We want to hear from you as well!

If you haven't been contacted by your Licensure worker this week, please give them a call or email them. Let them know how you are doing. PLEASE let them know if you need anything.

If your foster child(ren) has not been contacted by a caseworker, please reach out to them as well. Let them know how your foster child(ren) is doing, how they are dealing with the COVID-19 changes, how they are feeling physically and how they are adjusting to this stay-at-home world. Let our caseworkers know if there is ANYTHING they or you need from MDCPS.

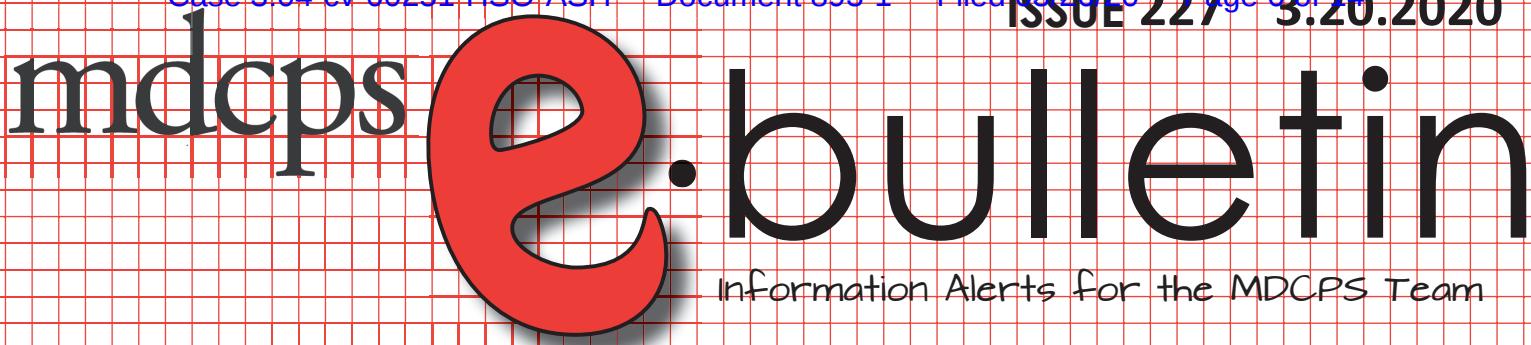
And, if is appropriate to do so, let your foster child(ren) speak on the phone with their biological family. While family visits are more difficult to happen in person right

now, let's keep those ties with loved ones as strong as we can. Use the phone. Try Facetime. Encourage your foster child to write a letter or draw a picture -- and send those through snail mail.

Contact with your MDCPS caseworkers will continue according to schedule. Face-to-face visits, when they cannot be accomplished in person because of health concerns, will be completed using Facetime or other programs such as GoogleDUO. These interactions are critical to MDCPS fulfilling our mission to protect the children and to keeping our promise to you.

The promise to be there. Every day. No matter what.

Again, THANK YOU for EVERYTHING you do.



mdcps **e-bulletin**
Information Alerts for the MDCPS Team

To: **ALL MDCPS**

STAYING IN TOUCH; KEEPING TRACK

As we discussed at the beginning of this TELEWORK period, it is critical for MDCPS staff to communicate regularly with their immediate supervisor. If you are having problems reaching individuals you need to reach, if your technology isn't functioning properly, if you have roadblocks, please reach out to your supervisor. Also, if you become ill or test positive for COVID-19, please notify your supervisor IMMEDIATELY.

REMINDER: By the end of business on Friday (that's NOW) you should have prepared and sent to your supervisor a summary of your week's work. If you haven't yet done so, please do so as quickly as possible. This calendar can be sent via email and should include:

1. A daily list of what you accomplished this week - tasks, job assignments, contacts, projects, etc.
2. A breakdown, by day, of the hours worked.
3. Any problems or issues you encountered.
4. A summary of how things are going - feedback on interaction with clients, technology, travel.

SUPERVISORS: Please summarize what you receive from the staff who report to you. Please share this information with your immediate supervisor by 9 a.m. on Monday.

RDs/BDs/ODs: Please summarize what you receive from the staff who report directly to you. Please share this information with the appropriate Deputy Commissioner/Executive Leadership Team member by 11 a.m. on Monday.

Let's keep the communication lines working - from top to bottom and back up again. And remember, our goal is OVER-COMMUNICATION!

If MDCPS Staff have any COVID-19 issues, please EMAIL:

MDCPS-COVID19@mdcps.ms.gov.

March 23, 2020



Foster Parent Alert #7

According to the Mississippi Department of Health and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, this week and next will be the test of how well our state's self-imposed quarantine and social distancing policies are working in an effort to slow the curve of COVID-19 infections in our state. So, don't grow weary of staying at home yet. Keep up the social distancing -- there is evidence that it works if everyone participates.

MDCPS is experiencing many of the same frustration you as foster families are -- mainly, how to balance the safety of our workers and clients (you, the foster children/youth in your care and their biological families) with the ongoing demands of our job.

We have instructed our caseworkers -- frontline, licensure and adoption -- to follow basic safety protocols in dealing with children and families on their caseload. Face-to-face visits are important but they should be held ONLY AFTER checking with the individuals to be involved in the meeting to make sure no one has tested positive for the virus or has been DIRECTLY exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. If face-to-face meetings are then not recommended, teleconferencing using Facetime or another app -- or a phone call -- may have to suffice. We are also giving our staff additional direction today on ways to avoid exposure when sharing paperwork with clients.

Just a reminder: 1. Continue to stay at home when you can. 2. Wash your hands thoroughly and often. 3. Avoid gatherings of 10 or more. 4. Call your health provider if you have symptoms of COVID-19, especially if you have a cough or are running a fever. 5. Keep your spirits up. Turn off the news. Read a book or play a game with your family instead. We're all in this together. We're going to do this right!

PLEASE READ: Resources available to parents, foster parents

School bells didn't ring across Mississippi this morning. Instead, the new classroom was most likely your kitchen table or some other comfortable spot in your home.

It is a new world. And, for most of us, it is not one where we're completely comfortable with the new roles being placed on us. If teaching is not your strong suit, don't fear. Local school districts promise they will provide parents with the resources they need to keep learning going on during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Mississippi Department of Education today posted a new webpage with lots of links to learning

resources for children from preschool age through high school. The "Learning at Home Resources" page is found on the MDE website located at: MDEK12.org New information will be posted there on a daily basis so check it out frequently for additional ideas and learning activities.

Also, attached to this email is a bulletin that MDCPS received today from the federal government. It highlights some of the new resources and federal benefits being made available through federal legislation just approved to benefit families across the U.S. during this time. It specifically notes that these

benefits, related to children, are available to foster parents as well as biological families.

If you have any questions at all about the COVID-19 situation in Mississippi, about where or how to get testing if you are symptomatic, information on the disease and its spread, or ways you can better protect your family, please visit the Mississippi State Department of Health website and click on the COVID-19 information link on their www.msdoh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420.html

Again, THANK YOU for EVERYTHING you do.

Guidelines for Contact with Clients During the Outbreak of COVID-19

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) is issuing the following guidance for all MDCPS staff. This guidance is intended to provide staff procedures that will ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children in MDCPS custody or under the Department's supervision while minimizing the risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19). All staff are expected to follow these procedures until further notice.

Please review this information, including the links below, with your leadership and staff and make any necessary adjustments to your policies and protocols. This guidance is not intended to address every scenario that may arise. MDCPS will continue to issue updates and guidance as circumstances change. In addition, all staff should continue to monitor updates from state and federal health officials, including the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

A. Guidance for Making In-Home Visits

This guidance applies to **all in-home visits** for any purpose.

When preparing for an in-home visit, staff must make a phone call to the home and speak with a member of the household prior to making the planned visit. During that phone call, ask the household member whether they or any other member of the household have:

1. traveled outside the United States or used mass transit (bus, train, air, etc.) within the United States within the last 14 days;
2. had contact with anyone with known COVID-19, or with anyone undergoing medical evaluation to determine whether they have COVID-19, within the last 14 days; and
3. has any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, fever, or shortness of breath).

- If the household member responds “No” to all three questions, proceed with the visit as normal.
- If the household member responds “Yes” to any of the three questions, immediately staff the case with a supervisor to assess whether there are any urgent risks or needs requiring immediate attention.
 - If there are urgent needs, assess whether those needs can be safely met remotely (e.g., over the phone, through Facetime, etc.).
 - If the urgent needs can be met remotely, forego an in-person visit and meet the needs remotely, instruct the household member to stay home and

contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health directly to report the potential case of COVID-19.

- If the client must be seen in person to meet urgent needs, instruct the affected household member to remain at home and contact their medical professional immediately, to use a mask if available, to place themselves in a separate room with the door closed if possible, and to be assessed by a medical professional before the visit occurs if time permits. When making the visit in the home with an affected household member, avoid all contact with the affected household member if possible and limit time in the home to that necessary to meet the urgent needs.
 - If there are not urgent needs, instruct the household member to stay home and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to directly report the potential case of COVID-19.

B. Guidance for Investigations

Child abuse and neglect investigations must proceed even as we move through the spread of COVID-19. When making initial contact with any individual during an investigation, ask the three questions above. If the individual answers “Yes” to any of the three questions, instruct the individual to stay home and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19, and contact the Mississippi State Department of Health directly to report the potential case of COVID-19. Further, limit contact with potentially affected individuals to the minimum amount necessary to complete the investigation.

C. Guidance for Screening Visitors to Offices and Residential Facilities

These procedures are for any office or facility that remains open and receives visitors or members of the public as a part of its daily operations.

- All facilities and offices receiving regular in-person contact with members of the public must immediately develop policies to schedule and pre-screen over the telephone all visits by non-clients, residents, or staff using the three questions above.
 - Upon screening, if a potential visitor answers “Yes” to any of the three questions above, politely instruct them not to visit the facility or office until the specific scenario can be further assessed and to contact the Mississippi State Department of Health to report their potential exposure to COVID-19.
- If a facility or office receives unscheduled visitors, politely instruct them to leave and call to schedule a visit

D. Guidance for Case Staffing

Supervisors must continue weekly case staffing. All case staffing must be conducted remotely via telephone, Facetime, etc.

E. General Guidelines

During any face-to face-contacts with clients, including investigations, staff should use social distancing techniques to the greatest extent possible. Effective social distancing includes eliminating any physical greetings—i.e. handshakes—or other physical contact between persons; maintaining physical distance between all individuals, preferably of at least six feet; and limiting physical objects—i.e. paperwork, pens, phones, tablets, etc.—from one person to another.

Some paperwork—such as Client’s Rights and Responsibilities (CRR), Grievance Procedures (GP), and Home Environment checklist (HEC)—is normally passed back and forth between client and investigator for reading and signatures. During this emergency, such documents should be read aloud to the client. The client then must be asked if they understand or have questions (as usual). If the client verbalizes understanding, the MDCPS staff person must sign the document and make a note at the bottom that indicates as follows:

“On (specific date) at (specific time), (client’s name) verbalized understanding of (CRR, Grievance Procedure, HEC, or other document being reviewed and signed).”

The MDCPS staff person must then take a picture of the document using their state cell phone or tablet and immediately text or email it to the client. All state cell phones and tablets have scanning capability as part of our One Drive package. Files can be screenshot and saved to be text or emailed. Or alternatively, the regular camera function can be used. When the staff person documents this encounter in MACWIS, they must clearly document that a copy was sent to the client electronically. The original hard copy must be filed in the investigation or case file.

Any other tasks ordinarily involving direct contact with clients—including, but not limited to, foster care reviews and family team meetings—should be conducted remotely if possible.

Additionally, everyone should follow the CDC’s guidelines for infection control basics including hand hygiene:

- [Infection Control Basics](#)
- [Hand Hygiene in Health Care Settings](#)
- [Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives](#)

F. Contact with Affected Persons

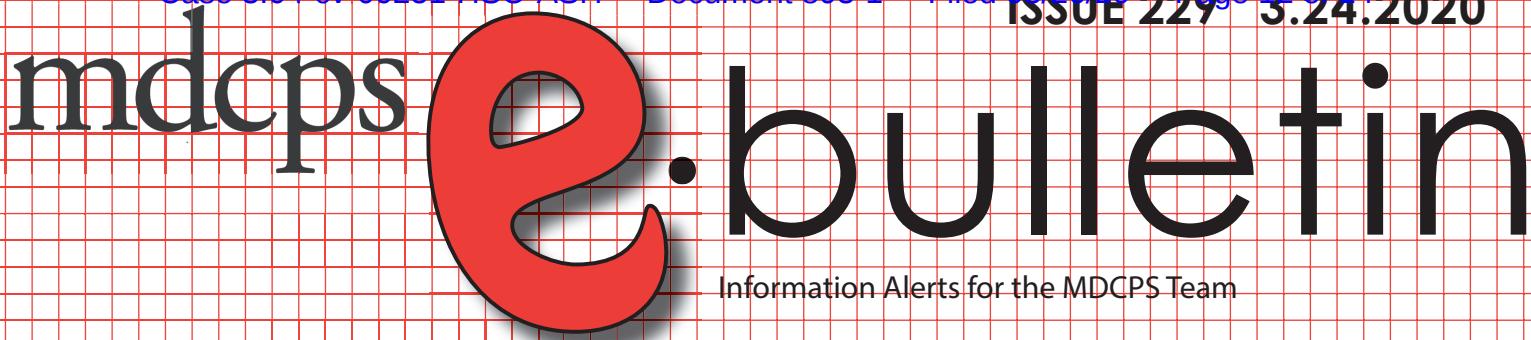
Staff who have had direct contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 must immediately self-quarantine for a period of fourteen days. During the self-quarantine period, staff must continue to telework, but should have no contact with clients and other staff. If symptoms develop during the self-quarantine period, contact your medical provider. If you test positive for COVID-19, report your positive test to MDCPS-COVID19@mdcps.ms.gov.

G. Documenting Impacts of COVID-19

If any work cannot be completed because of exposure or potential exposure to COVID-19, staff must document each task that was not completed because of COVID-19 through a narrative in MACWIS. This documentation must be made by entering contact type “Other,” appropriate contact method, and appropriate location with a narrative explaining the response to the screening question that prevented the task’s completion.

H. MDCPS Contracted Providers

All MDCPS contracted providers should consider this guidance non-exhaustive minimum guidelines. In addition to these guidelines, all providers should implement approved continuity of operations plans and such other preventative measures as they deem appropriate under the guidance issued by federal and state health officials.



mDCPS e-bulletin
Information Alerts for the MDCPS Team

To: ALL MDCPS
From: **TONYA ROGILLIO, Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare**
JAWORSKI DAVENPORT, Deputy Commissioner of Child Safety

UPDATED: Recording Face-to-Face Visits in MACWIS

In light of the information below received from Dr. Milner at the Children's Bureau, all face-to-face contacts with children and families, even those using Facetime or other videoconferencing means where the child is viewed remotely should be documented in MACWIS as follows:

Contact Type: Foster Child Contact (or other appropriate type)
Contact Method: Face-to-Face
Location: Home

NOTE: THE BODY OF THE NARRATIVE SHOULD CLEARLY DOCUMENT THAT THE VISIT WAS CONDUCTED USING FACETIME OR OTHER VIDEOCONFERENCING TECHNOLOGY, IF IT WAS.

However, if there are required visits or contacts that are unable to be made/conducted due to the COVID19 pandemic, that information should be documented as follows:

Contact Type: Other
Contact Method: Phone to
Location: Home (or other appropriate option)

NOTE: THE BODY OF THE NARRATIVE SHOULD CLEARLY DOCUMENT THAT THE TASK WAS NOT COMPLETED BECAUSE OF COVID-19 AND PROVIDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE VIRUS PREVENTED THAT TASK'S COMPLETION.

All other contacts should be documented as usual.

GUIDANCE FROM THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU

QUESTION: Does video conferencing between a child in foster care and his/her caseworker meet the Federal statutory provisions at section 422(b)(17) for caseworker visits on a monthly basis?

ANSWER: In general, no. Videoconferencing or any other similar form of technology between the child and caseworker does not serve as a monthly caseworker visit for the purposes of meeting the requirements of section 422(b)(17) of the Social Security Act (the Act). Rather, a monthly caseworker visit must be conducted face-to-face and held in person. Furthermore, the Act requires State and Tribal title IV-B agencies to describe standards for monthly caseworker visits with children in foster care that are well-planned and focused on issues pertinent to case planning and service delivery to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child.

However, there are limited circumstances in which a Title IV-B agency could waive the in-person aspect of the requirement and permit the monthly caseworker visit to be accomplished through a videoconferencing. Such circumstances are limited to those that are beyond the control of the caseworker, child, or foster family, such as a declaration of an emergency that prohibits or strongly discourages person-to-person contact for public health reasons; a child or caseworker whose severe health condition warrants limiting person-to-person contact; and other similar public or individual health challenges. Even in the face of such challenges, agencies must continue to comply with the monthly caseworker visit requirement. If an agency uses videoconferencing under these limited, specified circumstances, caseworkers must conduct the videoconference in accordance with the timeframe established in the Act, and must closely assess the child's safety at each conference. Also, we encourage agencies to consider plans of action should a caseworker not be able to reach a child via videoconference, or should the videoconference raise a concern about the child's safety or well-being. The waiver of the requirement would be narrowly limited to the timeframe during which the public or individual health challenge or issue renders it impossible or ill advised to meet the in-person requirement and should be well documented in the child's case plan.



Shared Parenting

Foster Parent Alert #8

There have been concerns raised by several foster families about whether or not it is safe to allow foster children to participate in scheduled visits with their biological family or whether MDCPS caseworkers should be allowed to visit in your homes. Our agency is working hand-in-hand with the Mississippi State Department of Health in crafting guidelines and policies to ensure that we do everything within our control to limit the exposure of our clients and our staff while still maintaining contact with the children in our custody and fulfilling our responsibilities to them and their families.

Our COVID-19 policy for client contact, in summary says:

BEFORE a caseworker visits your home for a face-to-face visit with your foster child(ren), they should call you to ask a few questions to determine if an in-home visit is safe. They will ask if anyone in the home has traveled outside of the US recently or used mass transit, is experiencing COVID-19 respiratory infection symptoms or has been tested positive for the virus. If the answer to any of these questions is YES, then the visit will be conducted using Facetime or other teleconferencing apps such as GoogleDUO. If the answer is NO, then it is considered safe to have an in-home visit. MDCPS staff have also been given guidelines to avoid exposing themselves or you to any avoidable transfer of the virus. (See below). While in your home, they will practice recommended social distancing, as should you.

Much the same safety checklist is followed before facilitating scheduled visits for foster children with biological family members. Also, please note that if a family visit is court-ordered, everyone is expected to cooperate in the visit unless the judge changes the order. Your caseworker will discuss any concerns beforehand. Feel free to express and explain your concerns in detail.

PLEASE READ: Tips for a safe in-home visit from MDCPS

During any face-to face-contacts with clients, including investigations, MDCPS staff have been instructed to use social distancing techniques to the greatest extent possible. Effective social distancing includes eliminating any physical greetings—i.e. handshakes—or other physical contact between persons; maintaining physical distance between all individuals, preferably of at least six feet; and limiting physical objects—i.e. paperwork, pens, phones, tablets, etc.—from one person to another.

Some paperwork—such as Client's Rights and Responsibilities (CRR), Grievance Procedures (GP),

and Home Environment checklist (HEC)—is normally passed back and forth between client and MDCPS caseworker or investigator for reading and signatures. During this emergency, such documents should be read aloud to the client. The client then must be asked if they understand or have questions (as usual). If the client verbalizes understanding, the MDCPS staff person must sign the document and make a note at the bottom that indicates as follows: "On (specific date) at (specific time), (client's name) verbalized understanding of (CRR, Grievance Procedure, HEC, or other document being reviewed and signed)."

The MDCPS staff person must then take a picture of the document using their state cell phone or tablet and immediately text or email it to the client.

Our caseworkers have also been instructed about other basic physical steps they can take while in your home to minimize contact and exposure. This includes limiting the surfaces they touch and making no physical contact with anyone in your home. There should be no food or beverages shared and, as always, if anyone in the household is not feeling well, they should not be in the room during the MDCPS visit.

Again, THANK YOU for EVERYTHING you do.

mdcps e.bulletin

Information Alerts for the MDCPS Team

To: ALL MDCPS
From: KRIS JONES, *Deputy Commissioner of Administration*

UPDATE TO EMERGENCY TELEWORK POLICY

The MDCPS Emergency Telework Policy issued previously has now been updated to clarify flexible work schedules created by the COVID-19 situation and teleworking arrangements for most MDCPS Staff.

Please read the attached document. The updated information is underlined in the attached document and reprinted below.

Flexible Scheduling When Teleworking

To the greatest extent possible, MDCPS does allow flexibility with employee work schedules while telework is being implemented. For job responsibilities that are dependent upon other MDCPS employees or external stakeholders (such as other state agencies, foster parents, licensed MDCPS providers, etc.), MDCPS expects that the work is accomplished during the typical working hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For job responsibilities that are independent of other MDCPS employees or external stakeholders (such as documentation, DocuSign approvals, administrative tasks, etc.), MDCPS does allow flexibility in accomplishing those responsibilities.

Any requests for flexible work schedules must be approved by the employee's direct supervisor and communicated to the appropriate Office Director for final approval. Approvals must be sent to the Office of Human Resources for tracking and audit purposes. The ongoing monitoring and management of approved flex schedules is the responsibility of the immediate supervisor.

As addressed on page 1 of this document, all essential MDCPS personnel are expected to work a full 8-hour day from their remote work location(s) even if this is accommodated through flexible scheduling. Agency Comp time must only be granted to essential MDCPS personnel that work more than eight (8) hours in a workday.

If you have additional questions, please contact your immediate supervisor.